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# EXPLORING THE MUGHAL GARDENS AT FATHPUR SIKRI

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Mughal gardens as a subject of historical study have gained much currency in recent years.<sup>1</sup> From a study of individual gardens<sup>2</sup> to a study of gardens in general,<sup>3</sup> almost every aspect of the Mughal garden has been analysed. The present paper, by exploring the forgotten gardens laid out at Fathpur Sikri seeks to add to the information on Mughal gardens. The gardens were located as part of an ongoing survey being conducted at Fathpur Sikri under the aegis of the Centre of Advanced Study in History, Aligarh Muslim University.<sup>4</sup>

The Mughal gardens, from the point of view of their purpose, can fall into four categories: (a) Pleasure gardens; (b) gardens which served as substitute royal residences for the emperor when on a journey; (c) funerary gardens containing the tomb of the owner in the centre; and (d) gardens attached to the residence of a noble or the palace of an emperor. The last named were known either as the *khanabagh*<sup>5</sup> or *sarai bustan*.<sup>6</sup> A garden (*bagh*) could be a *bustan* (orchard) or a *gulistan* (flower garden) or an elaborately laid out *Chaharbagh* (a four-fold garden).<sup>7</sup> The pleasure gardens were mostly layed out as a *Chaharbagh* with either a *baradari* (a pavilion with three pillared openings on each side) or a water tank in the middle where the causeways and the water channels intersect each other. In the *Chaharbagh* a square or rectangular area is divided into four quadrants by two axes which comprise water channels and pathways. Depending on the area to be enclosed the quadrant could be divided and sub-divided to create the same module on different scales.<sup>8</sup> At the points of intersection, water tanks (*hauz*) and platforms were built. In case the gardens was to serve as the halting ground for the emperor or the noble, a number of the rooms and structures were added to it.<sup>9</sup>

After the death of the owner, the pleasure garden which belonged to him would be converted into a funerary garden with the construction of a sepulchre at the centre where once the *baradari* or the central platform stood.

Apart from their aesthetic value, the medieval gardens provided the rulers a space to preside over large assemblies of armed followers.<sup>10</sup> The association of the village of Sikri with the Mughals started with the construction of a garden for the same purpose. The garden

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*Bagh-i Fath* was constructed on the orders of Babur after his victory over Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar in the Battle of Kanwa in March, 1527.<sup>11</sup> It was the name of this garden which later on inspired Akbar to rename the town as Fathpur Sikri.

When in 1571 orders were issued by Akbar to construct the New Imperial City, it was ordained that orchards (*basatin*) and gardens (*baghat*) should be laid out "at its periphery and centre" and "trees were grown in the environs which had formerly been the habitat of rabbits and jackals".<sup>12</sup> Within a short period a large number of gardens were laid out. Writing in 1610, William Finch mentions:

"To the entrance of the Agra gate, some course in length upon a stony ascent, lie the ruins of the suburbs; as also without the south-west gate for two English miles in length, many faire buildings being fallen to the ground; and on the left hand are many faire enclosed gardens, three miles almost from the citie".<sup>13</sup>

From these accounts it becomes clear that gardens were laid out not only within the city but also outside the ramparts.

During the course of our survey, a total of 29 gardens were located, of which only three are well known, being inside the palace complex. Out of the remaining 26 gardens six are located outside the Ajmeri Darwaza to the North-West of the township. Of the twenty gardens within the city walls, 6 were revealed in the area located to the South of the ridge (see Plan I). The majority of the gardens were revealed in the area between the Ajmeri Darwaza and the Hathipol (see Plan II).

From the typological point of view nine (including the three in the palace complex) were *khana bagh* or *saria bustan* (house gardens), four *bustan* (orchards), one *Gulistan* (flower garden) and fifteen *Chaharbagh* gardens. Among the *Chaharbagh* gardens, two are provided with a *baradari*, three have *baolis* (stepwells) attached to them and one is provided with a *hammam*.

It appears that at least two of the *Chaharbaghs* located at Fathpur Sikri pre-date Akbar and were possibly the creations of Babur.

We have evidence that Babur ordered the construction of three structures at Fathpur Sikri. Dealing with the renunciation of wine during his campaign against Rana Sanga, Babur writes (in AH.933/Feb., 1527).

"At the place where the wine was poured upon the ground, a well was ordered to be dug, built-up with stone and having an almshouse beside it. It was already finished in Muharram 935 (Sept. 1528) at the time I went to Sikri from Dholpur on my way back from visiting Gualiar".<sup>14</sup>

An inscription of the same year (A.H.933/1526-27 A.D.) was discovered during the 19th century,<sup>15</sup> adorning the well of a stepwells known as Indarawali *baoli*. The inscription recorded as follows:

“At the command of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Badshahi Ghazi* (May Allah perpetuate his realm and rule) the construction of this well was, through the divine grace, completed in the year 933 A.H. after (the Emperor) had returned conquering and victorious from his campaigns against the misbelieving Rana Sanga.”<sup>16</sup>

The information contained in the *Baburnama* and the location of the inscription suggests that the so-called Indarawali *baoli*<sup>17</sup> was constructed some time in 1527 A.D. on the orders of Babur. Architecturally, the *baoli* resembles the well of the *Bagh-i Nilofar* constructed at Dholpur upon orders issued the same year.<sup>18</sup>

.At both the wells, a wide *chhajja* like octagonal ledge replaces the coping, which is supported by carved “Hindu” brackets.<sup>19</sup> A deep flight of steps, leads to the octagonal well. Interestingly there are 13 steps until the first platform, then 12 and ultimately 11 which descend to the water level. There are pillared galleries at each level of the shaft, which are adorned with rosettes, carved brackets and *Chandrashalas* (niche-like forms) on the pillar bases (see Plate 1 and 2) which are typical features of Babur’s time.<sup>20</sup> The well is octagonal and was once provided with pulleys. At the exterior, four sides of the octagon are curved into circular tanks. A rectangular tank to collect water is also provided for at the back of the octagonal well. Aligned to the North-East of this *baoli* are the remains of the *Chaharbagh*. Although the site is now a cultivated field, the contours of the garden are still discernible<sup>21</sup> (see Plate 3). A *baoli* or well could never have stood in isolation. Probably this garden of the Indarawali *baoli* was also constructed alongside with the stepwell, and was thus a Baburi Garden.

During the same year two months later in Rajab 933 A.H. (April 1527) Babur ordered the construction of yet another garden at Sikri,<sup>22</sup> which contained a garden well and “a well-building” (*baoli?*),<sup>23</sup> which were being constructed under the supervision of the emperor himself.<sup>24</sup> Our Survey revealed a large elaborately designed rectangular *Chaharbagh* (no.11 on Plan I) to the West of the Indarawali *baoli* which immediately reminds one of the famous *Bagh-i Nilofar* of Dholpur (see Plates 4, 5 and 6). Built near the ridge, this *Chaharbagh* has a total length of 174 m and a breadth of 108 m. Aligned in an East-West direction, the garden derives its beauty from the ridge at the back and the view of the lake in the front (Plan III) The main area of the garden is at a raised height (in the shape of a platform, 140x95m)

with a red sand stone *baradari* in the middle. The four pathways (*khiyabans*) and water channels were provided with *abshars* (chutes) at the corners. During the survey a stone *abshar* with fish-scale (*mahipusht*) design was excavated (see Plate 5). After a 1.80 m wide corridor, at a lower level (around 2 m) the whole garden was surrounded by low-arched vaults. The span of the arches was 3.30 m and the walls were 1.00 m thick. Towards the West the remains of a *baoli* are traceable, the stones (*khandas* in the local usage) having been carted away by the present farmer who owns the area. Between the remains of the *baoli* and the main garden area, rectangular stone slab forming the platform can still be seen. Towards the East, at a distance of 5 m from the arched vaults, is a well with a diameter of 4.40 m and an octagonal platform with each side measuring 2.80 m. A water channel from this well leads to the excavated *abshar*. At a distance of 12 m to the North was located a pillared (and cupola mounted) octagonal platform with each side measuring 4.40 m.

The *baradari* in the middle of this garden is square with each side measuring 5.90 m. Was this the *Chaharbagh* which Babur says he ordered built and which he says contained garden walls and a well-building? The location of this garden (near the Indarawali *baoli* of Babur) and the style of construction strongly hints at its associations with Babur. No other garden at Fathpur Sikri has such grace and style as this "Baradari Garden" between Ajmeri Darwaza and Indarawali Baoli. A number of Akbari *Chaharbaghs*, which are quite simple and adorned with only platforms with *hauz* flank it from both the sides. This garden, if constructed before Akbar would have provided the best panoramic view of the surroundings; and its site would naturally have been chosen first.

Among the *bustan* gardens of Akbar inside the ramparts, the most spectacular appears to be no.12 (see Plan I) situated on the banks of the lake near the Qush Khana (see Plate 7 and Plan IV). Measuring 132 x 130 m, this garden is adorned by a circular tank with a diameter of 6.35 m which was provided with a fountain sprout in the middle. The tank is surrounded by a 12.50 m square platform, only the remains of which are visible. The garden was surrounded with low rubble walls. To the south is constructed an octagonal tank which is 12.25 m long and 9.10 m wide receiving its water from a well (3 m diameter), situated 25 m further to the south. The water channel connecting the well and the octagonal tank is still visible. Further to the South and South-West are the ruins of another structure, popularly known as Kalan Mahal. Was this then a private garden (*bustan sarai*) of a noble?

To the North West of Ajmeri Darwaza outside the ramparts are a series of gardens, of which the present survey revealed six. There might have been an equal number of gardens to the South West as well, but they remain to be explored. All the six gardens are in a row, 208 m long. The first of the gardens just near Ajmeri Darwaza appears to have been terraced in three levels. Starting from the road coming out of the Ajmeri Darwaza it is 138.95 m wide (see Plan V). The garden opens into a 52.70 m wide space followed by a *Chaharbagh* measuring 138.95 x 112 m with water channels and *khiyabans* culminating in a central platform, only the traces of which remain (Plate 9). The channels where they survive are 0.40 m wide and are connected to a well (diameter 3.65 m) located on the brink of the lake. Beyond the *Chaharbagh* is another plot (at a lower level) which is 43.50 m wide. This area is formed with sedimentary deposits from the lake. At the western corner are constructed four chambers, each measuring 2.70x4.70 m. Further to the North, half inside the lake is a pre-Akbari Water Pavilion (see Plan VI) which is 40.00 m long and 25.50 m wide. Only the arch of the ground floor remains above the ground level (see Plate 8). It appears that this pre-Akbari structure was built much before the raising of the ground level, through sedimentation, to the level on which Hada Mahal, ramparts, and Ajmeri Darwaza were built. When constructed, the pavilion would have been totally submerged in the waters of the lake. Even a cursory look at the ground-plan of the structure would show that care was taken to allow easy passage of the water from one end to another. In its elevation, the structure comprised a high central platform with two lower platforms raised on arches towards the north and the south. The central platform was provided with slender pillars at the four corners on which a temporary shed could be raised. On the eastern and western corners of this platform an opening each (like a *sandas* seat) on the terrace was given which opened into narrow chambers closed from all the sides. Were these latrines? Remnants of red coloured plaster and a few carved stone and pillar pieces which might have once adorned the central platform were found during our survey. The whole structure is built of locally available light-coloured sand stone rubble. The walls are thick and the whole is very crudely constructed — it appears to have been quite hurriedly built to carry out the wishes of an overbearing master. It would seem that this, indeed, is the water-pavilion which Babur writes about.<sup>25</sup>

It was only when Akbar regulated the lake and gave it a formal shape that the site came to be situated on its banks. The sedimentary deposit, the half buried arches and walls and the level of the ground of the Hada Mahal only 55 m away points towards this. During the reign of Akbar when Ajmeri Darwaza was built, the road to Ajmer was for-

mally constructed and the gardens were laid, did this structure become an appendage to the garden. During the reign of Akbar it possibly served as a 'garden pavilion' for weary travellers staying at the *Chaharbagh* outside the city walls.

The second garden towards the west was 127 m wide and was quite similar to the garden of the water Pavilion described above, except that it was a *bustan* rather than a *Chaharbagh*. A *baoli* constructed to the South of the road opposite this second garden took care of the gardens located to the south west of the Ajmeri Darwaza below the ridge.

At Fathpur Sikri there appears to be only one *gulistan* or flower garden which took care of the needs of the *khushboo khana* (the Royal Perfumery) located to the south west of the *Diwan-i Am*. Towards the southern ramparts of the city, near the Chandra Pol gateway (a subsidiary entrance to the city) just besides the locality known as Nagla Maliyan is a rectangular garden (no.4 on Plan I) where till recently roses and other perfumed flowers were grown. Not much except a maze of water channels and a number of wells and a late 17th century *baradari* survives at this place.

Apart from the *Chaharbaghs*, *bustans* and a *gulistan* from the times of Babur and Akbar, our Survey also revealed a Garden complex constructed by Shahjahan. Adjoining the second *sarai* near the Hathipol on the Hiran Minar - Ajmeri Darwaza Road, just below the Shahjahan's *Daulatkhana* on the ridge<sup>26</sup> is the *Chaharbagh* which is almost square in plan. Measuring 113.20x90.70 m, the walled garden is shielded behind a row of vaulted shops (the Hathipol *Bazar* extending from this point to the Indarwali Ghati)<sup>27</sup> (See Plan VII). In the middle of the garden is a 7.70 m square platform, the stones adorning the *khiyabans* and water channels, have totally disappeared; only the rubble foundations still remain. To the south adjoining the ridge is a structure comprising two chambers on top of a platform. Possibly these were the changing rooms. A screened 'Z' shaped staircase descends from Shahjahan's *daulatkhana* to the eastern door of this structure. After a 17 m wide platform to the west of the structure is situated a covered pleasure pavilion comprising a *baoli* and a number of subterraneous porticoes and chambers (Plan VIII and Plate 10). Measuring 57.20x21.00 m, this structure (at the ground level) is fronted with a double platform. On the Eastern and Western flanks are shallow masonry water tanks, water to which was brought through pulleys resting on beams protruding from the ledge of the square well. To the south is a roofless chamber fronted with radiating arched screen. Entrance to the underground chambers and porticoes is through two sets

of stairs, opening towards the *Chaharbagh* below the lower platform. The western staircase appears to have been reserved for the service staff as it descends into a low serviceroom attached to the western wing of the structure. The eastern staircase leads straight into a 7.45x5.80 vaulted chamber which opens into a large beautifully decorated portico 6.95x6.00 m in length and breadth. This eastern portico contains a beautiful stone *abshar* emanating from its back wall. The water to this was supplied from the overhead water tank. An air ventilator also opens into a *taq* of this portico. A similar vaulted portico is constructed on the west of the square well. A third portico is situated towards the south. A chamber each towards the south-west and south east connect the three porticoes to each other. A flight of steps from the north western chamber lead to the water level in the *baoli*-well which measures 7.50x 7.50 m. Covered with lime-mortar and shell plaster the wall is painted in carvo-Intaglio with hirmichi (brick) red and blue floral and geometrical patterns, which are typically Shahjahani in nature. The dados in the south-eastern room are still quite visible (see Plate 11). The circular vaults of all the three porticoes are also beautifully painted in typical Shahjahani style (see Plates 12 and 13).

This *Chaharbagh* with the garden buildings appears to have been a *khana bagh* or *pa-in bagh* of Shahjahan's *daulatkhana*.

A number of other *khana baghs*, mostly dating from the period of Akbar were also discovered. They are however quite small in dimensions as compared to Shahjahan's *khanabagh*. For example, the residential structures identified as Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan's house, the Iranian noble's structure on the northern ridge, the *yatishkhana* of the animal superintendent, the *Yatishkhana* of the superintendent of the Hathipol Sarai, the *Fardkhana* (guest house) near the *Diwan-i Am* and the main *daulatkhana* of Shahjahan on top of the ridge, all contain house-gardens.<sup>28</sup> The house of Khan-i Khanan, the *yatishkhana* of the Superintendent of the Sarai and Shahjahan's *daulatkhana* have small *Chaharbagh* style gardens with square tanks and stone ashlayered *khiyabans* (Plate 14). The *Yatishkhana* of the Animal Superintendent and the structure of the Sarai Superintendent have gardens with circular rubble-stone measured flower beds (Plate 15). All these *khanabaghs* were situated inside the house in the courtyard area. It was only in the case of the structure of the Iranian noble on the northern ridge that we find that the *khanabagh* was in the shape of a *pa-in bagh* (garden outside the main structure but in its shadow).

A large number of other gardens were constructed and laid out in the plains of Fathpur Sikri but they await re-discovery through some



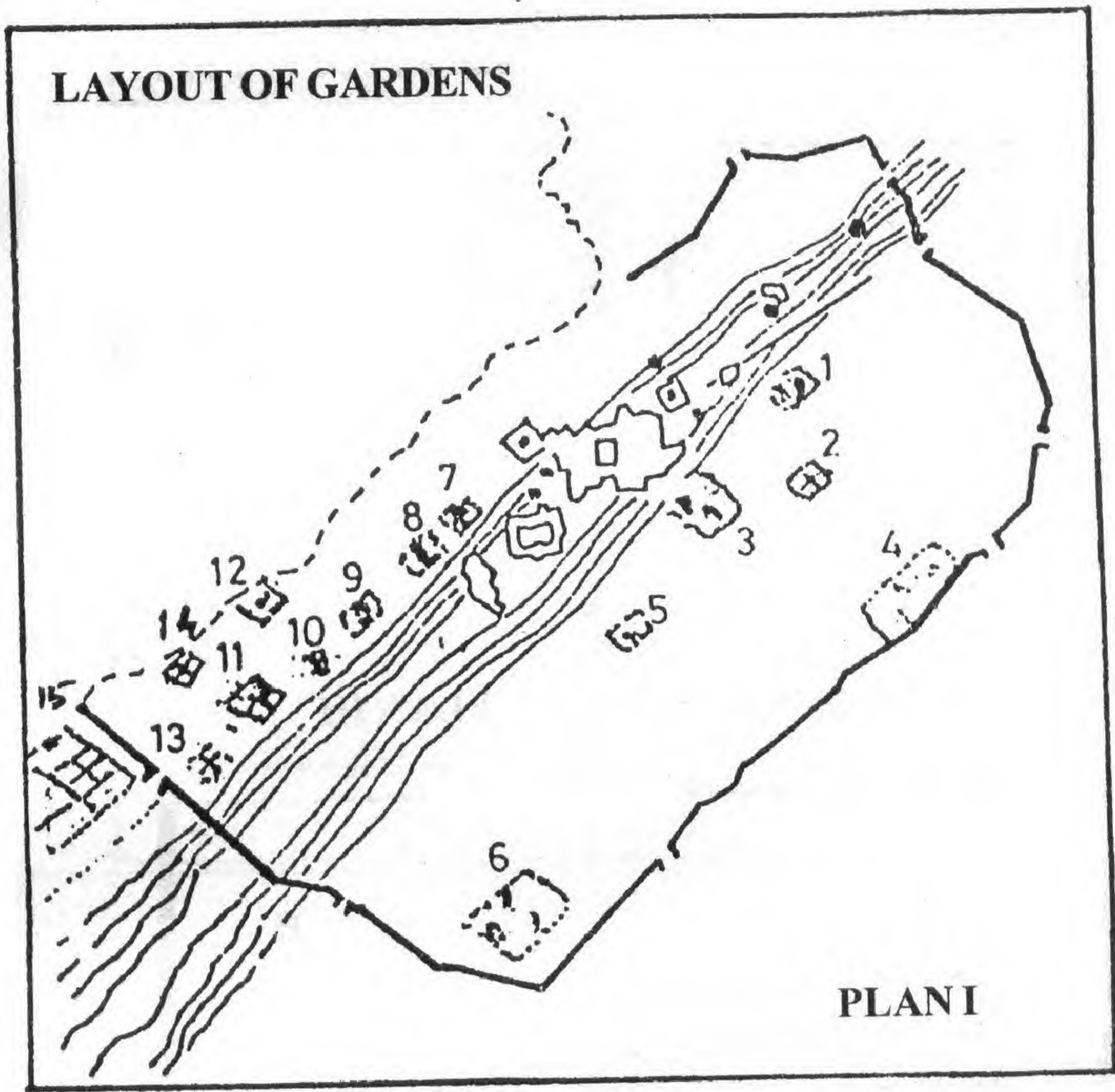
future exploration of the area. Suffice it to say, Fathpur was not only a 'City of Victory' but also a city of Gardens. Babur initiated its development with the construction of a garden and garden structures; the constructional activity at Fathpur ended with the building of Shahjahan's palace and garden. Enough is, then, known about the gardens of Fathpur Sikri for us to claim that no study of the Mughal capital for a brief decade and a half can be complete without setting the gardens alongside the covered spaces, on which attention is naturally more easily focused.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sylvia Crow, Sheila Haywood & Susan Jellicoe, *The Gardens of Mughal India*, London, 1972; E.B. Mac. Dougall & R. Ettinghausen, ed., *The Islamic Garden*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture 4, Washington, D.C., 1976; Elizabeth B. Moynihan, *Paradise as a Garden in Persia and Mughal India*, London, 1979; J.D. Hunt, ed., *Garden History: Issues, Approaches, Methods*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture 13, Washington, D.C., 1992; James L. Wescoat Jr. & Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, ed., *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations and Prospects*, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture XVI, Washington, D.C., 1996.
2. Eg. Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, The New Cambridge History of India, I:4, Cambridge, 1992; Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, Munich, 1991; Elizabeth B. Moynihan, "The Lotus Garden Palace of Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur", *Muqarnas*, vol.5, ed. Oleg Grabar, Leiden, 1988, pp.135-152; S.J. Dar, *Some Ancient Gardens of Lahore*, Lahore, 1976, etc.
3. Susan Jellicoe, "The Development of the Mughal Garden", *The Islamic Garden*, op. cit., pp.125-29; also J.L. Wescoat Jr., "The Islamic Garden: Issues for Landscape Research", *Environmental Designs*, ed. A. Petruccioli, Italy, 1986, pp.10-19.
4. The survey of Mughal Gardens at Fathpur Sikri undertaken during June-July, 1997, is a part of a joint-project being conducted by Prof. Shireen Moosvi and the author to study the lesser known monuments and structures at Agra, Fathpur Sikri and Delhi. This paper also utilizes some of the findings of the author under a project on the study of the Town Planning of Fathpur Sikri (funded, again, by the CAS in History Research Programme, AMU) which is being conducted since 1989. The author is beholden to Mr Anis Alvi (for plan reconstructions), Mr Zameer Ahmad (for drawing plans), Mr. Ghulam Mujtaba (for the photographs) and Mr Hussam Haider (pottery interpretation) — all from the Archaeology Section of the Centre who formed the Survey team for the said projects. I am also beholden to the late Mr Rajiv Sharma and Dr Jabir Raza, my colleagues in the centre for their invaluable help.
5. For example, Lahori *Badshahnama*, ed. Maulvi Kabiruddin Ahmad & Maulvi Abdur Rahim, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1866-72, I, pt.1, p.243.
6. Muhammad Salih Kamboh, *Amal-i Salih*, ed. Ghulam Yazadani, Calcutta, 1912-46, III, p.46.
7. For a difference between a simple *bagh* and a *Chaharbagh*; see R. Pinder-Wilson,

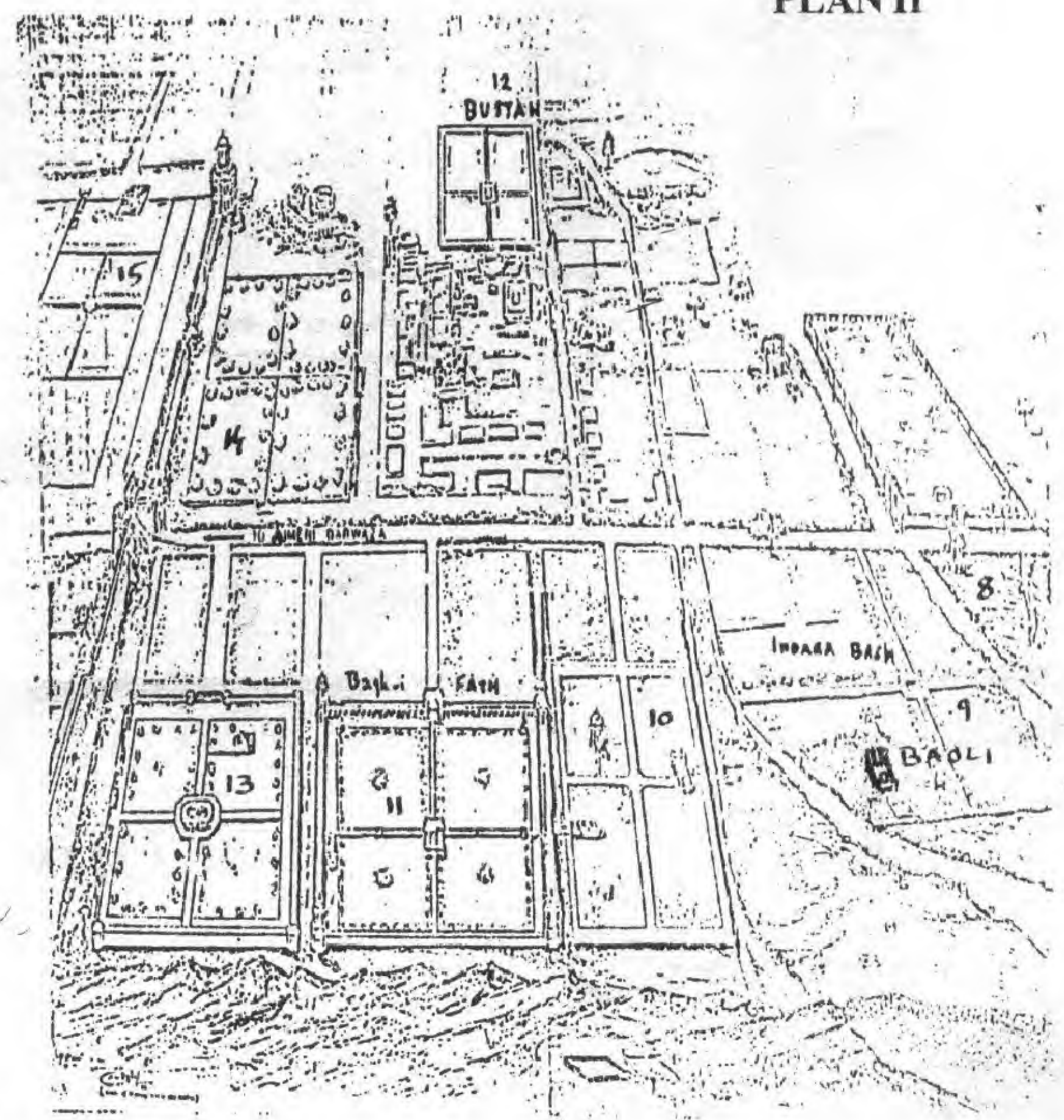
- "The Persian Garden: *Bagh* and *Chaharbagh*", in *The Islamic Garden*, op. cit., pp.71-85.
8. See for details, James Dickie, "The Mughal Garden: Gateway to Paradise", *Muqarnas*, ed. Oleg Graber, Vol.3, 1985, pp.133.
  9. See from example the description of *Bagh-i Nilufar* of Babur in Elizabeth Moynihan, "The Lotus Garden", *Muqarnas*, 5, op. cit.
  10. J.L. Wescoate Jr., "Garden versus Citadels: The Territorial Context of Early Mughal Gardens", in J.D. Hunt, ed., *Garden History*, op. cit., pp.174-86.
  11. Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, ed. A.S. Beveridge, Delhi, 1970 (reprint), p.581; also pp.585, 588 & 616.
  12. Arif Qandhari, *Tarikh-i Akbari*, Rampur, 1962, p.150. See also Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, Nawal Kishore, ed., Lucknow, 1882, Vol.II, p.84.
  13. W. Finch, "Account in *Early Travels in India: 1583-1619*", ed. W. Foster, London, 1921, p.149.
  14. *Baburnama*, op. cit., p.552.
  15. The inscription was first discovered by Saeed Ahmad Marahravi, *Athar-i Akbari* or *Tarikh-i Fathpur Sikri*, Agra, 1324 A.H., pp.151-52 (Urdu), it could not be deciphered at that time.
  16. See M. Ashraf Husain, "Inscriptions of the emperor Babur", *Epigraphia India: Arabic & Persian Supplement*, 1965, pp.50-51. The inscription subsequently was shifted to a nearby well from where it was removed for preservation. See S. Athar Abbas Rizvi & A.J. Flynn, *Fathpur Sikri*, Taraporevala, 1975, p.11.
  17. It is situated around 1 1/4 km to the west of Hiran Minar on the road leading from the Hathipol to Ajmeri Darwaza.
  18. *Baburnama*, op. cit., pp.585, 616.
  19. For the Dholpur Garden of Babur See, Elizabeth. Moynihan, "The Lotus Garden", *Muqarnas*, Vol.V, op. cit. & Catherine Asher, *Mughal Architecture*, op. cit.
  20. C. Asher, *Mughal Architecture*, op. cit., p.22, also discusses the Indarawali Baoli.
  21. A photograph taken from atop the ridge brought out the outlines of the *Chaharbagh* very clearly, Basing on the these photographs, Mr Anis Alvi was kind enough to reconstruct the outlines of this garden on paper.
  22. *Baburnama*, op. cit., p.581.
  23. Ibid., pp.615-16.
  24. Ibid.
  25. *Baburnama*, op. cit., p.588. The pavilion was constructed in 1526 A.D.
  26. For the consruction of Shahajahan's *daulatkhana*, See Muhammad Waris, *Badshahnama*, MS. BM. Or 1675, vol.II, pp.244 & 284 (Manuscript, Department of History, AMU, Aligarh). For details of this complex, see my paper "Shahjahan's Palace at Fathpur Sikri", *PIHC*, Chennai, 1996.
  27. See S. Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Planning and Layout of Fathpur Sikri", paper presented in the National Seminar on Urbanization in Medieval India, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, September 1997 (mimeographed).
  28. For the placèment and discussion of these structures see S. Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Planning & Lay out of Fathpur Sikri", op. cit., & Idem, "Bureancratic and Noble's Structures in Fathpur Sikri: A Survey", *IHC*, Warangal, 1992 (mimeographed).

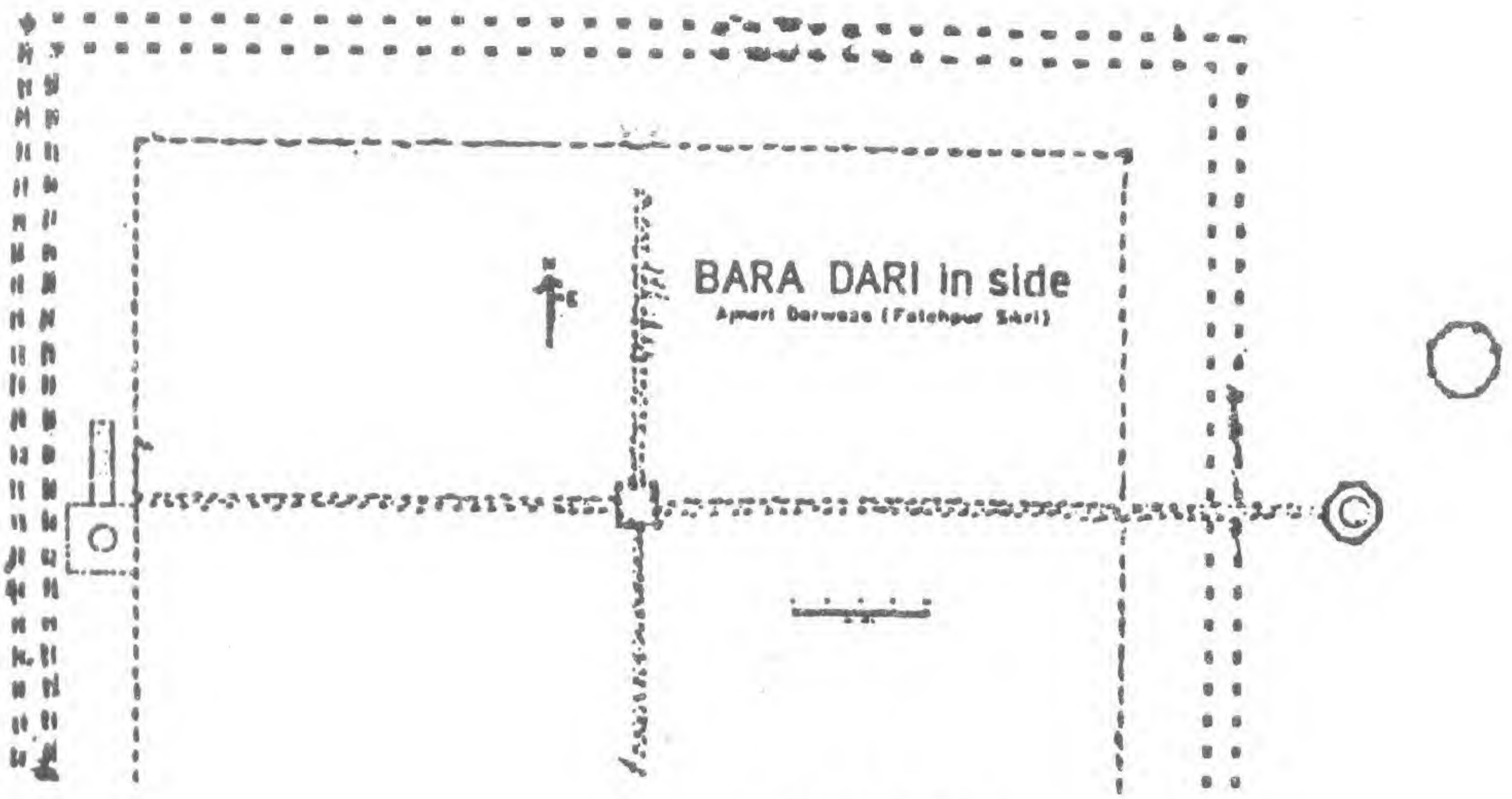
### LAYOUT OF GARDENS



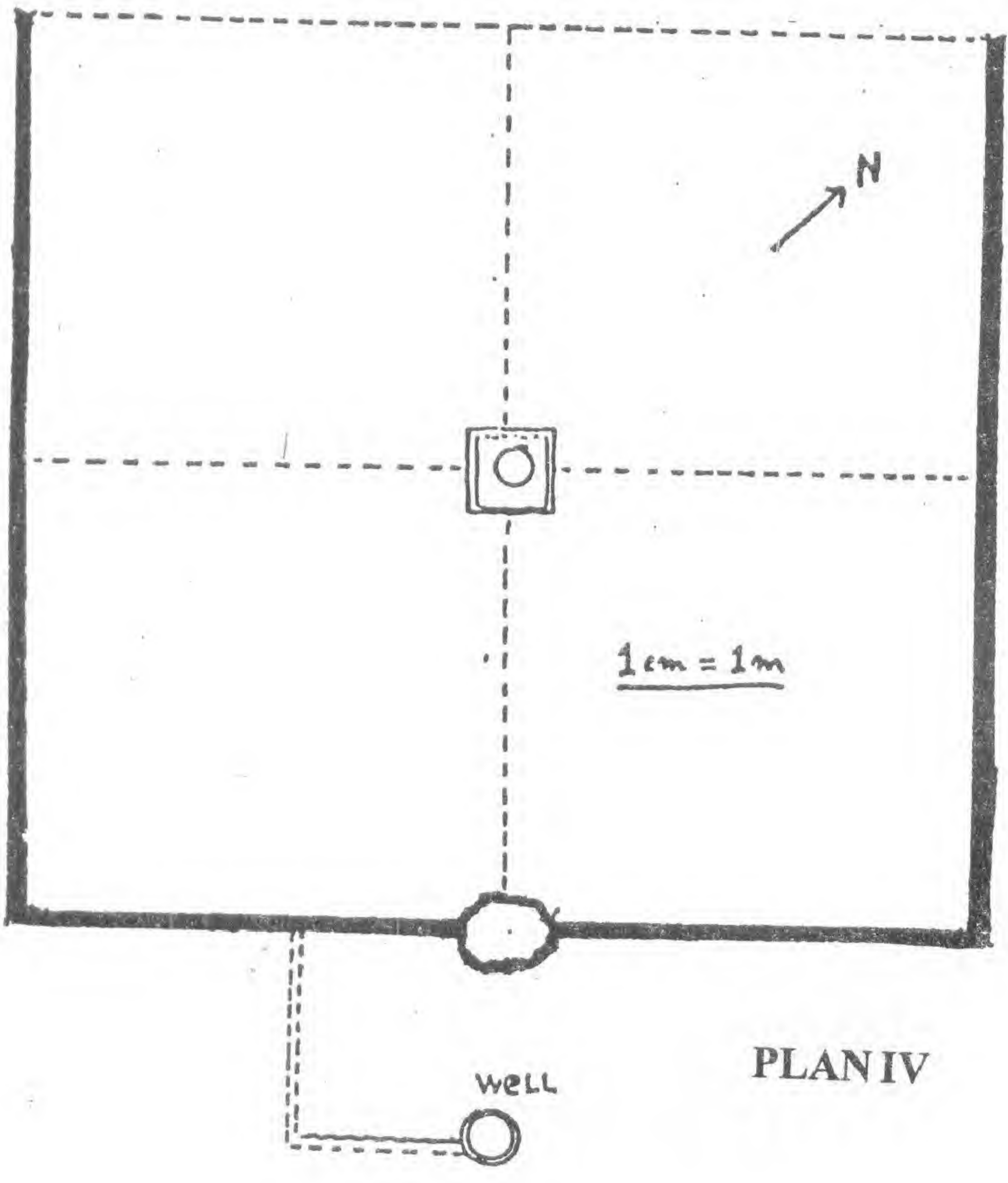
PLAN I

PLAN II

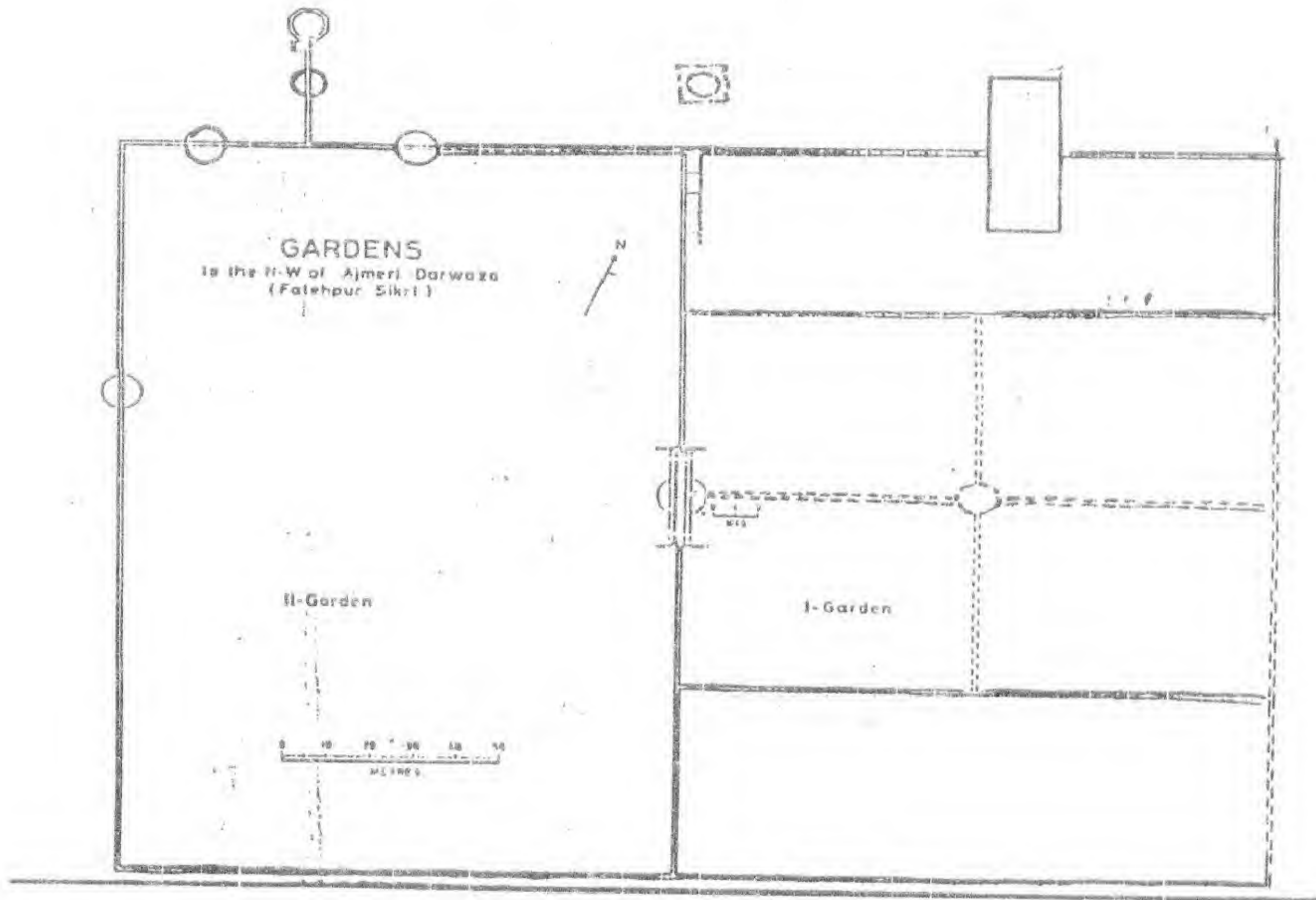




PLAN III

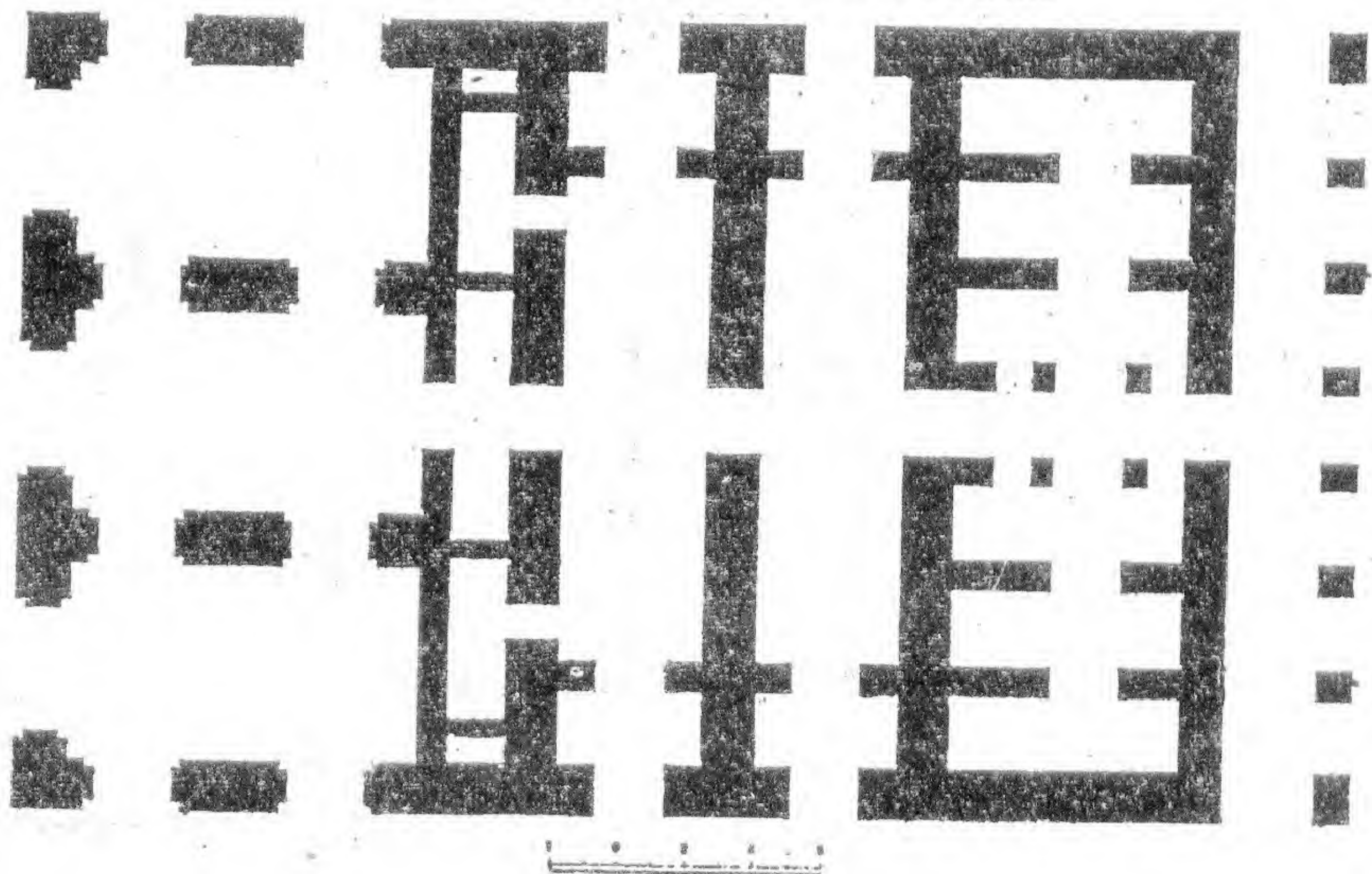


PLAN IV

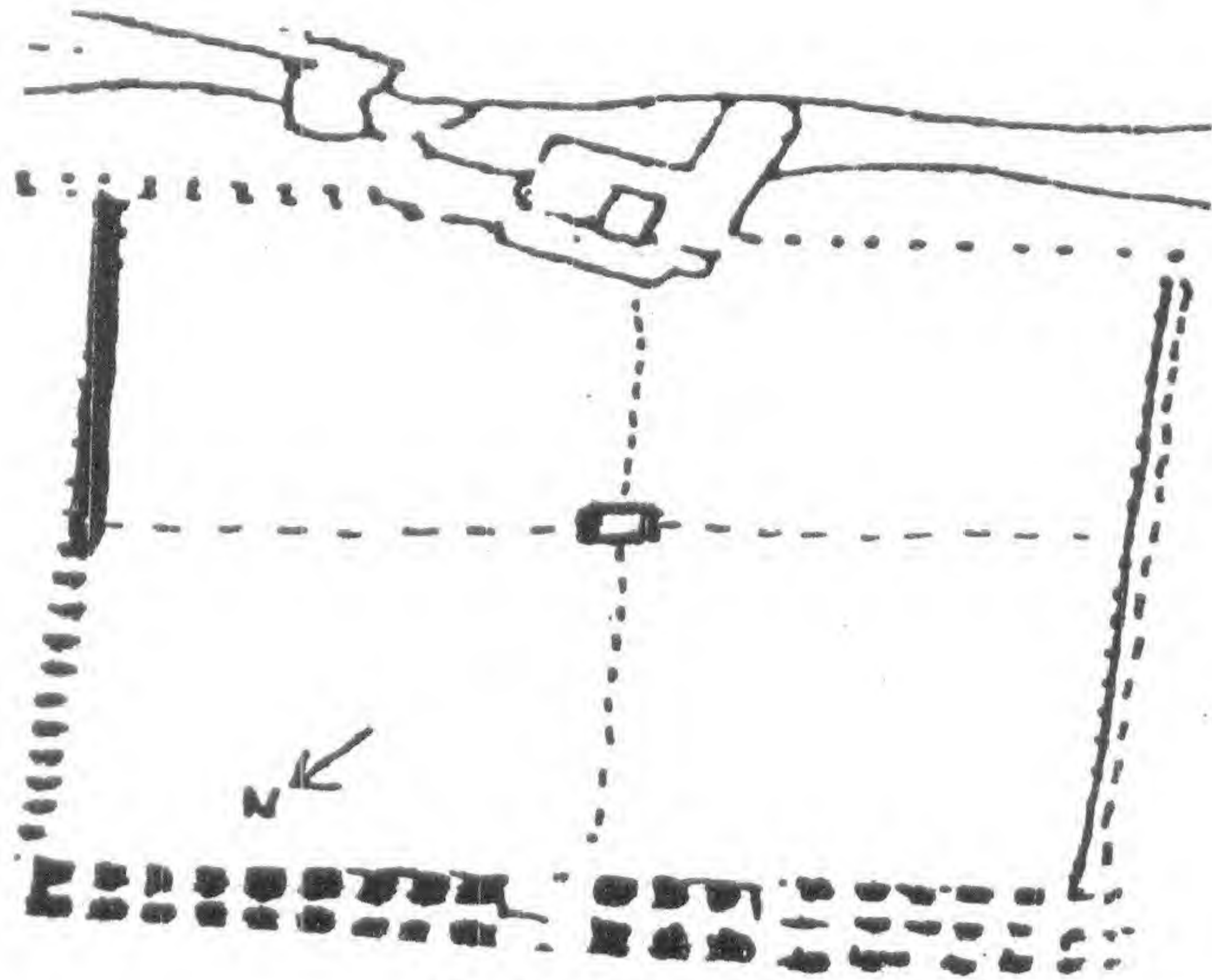


PLAN V

WATER PAVILION  
to the North West of Hada Mahal

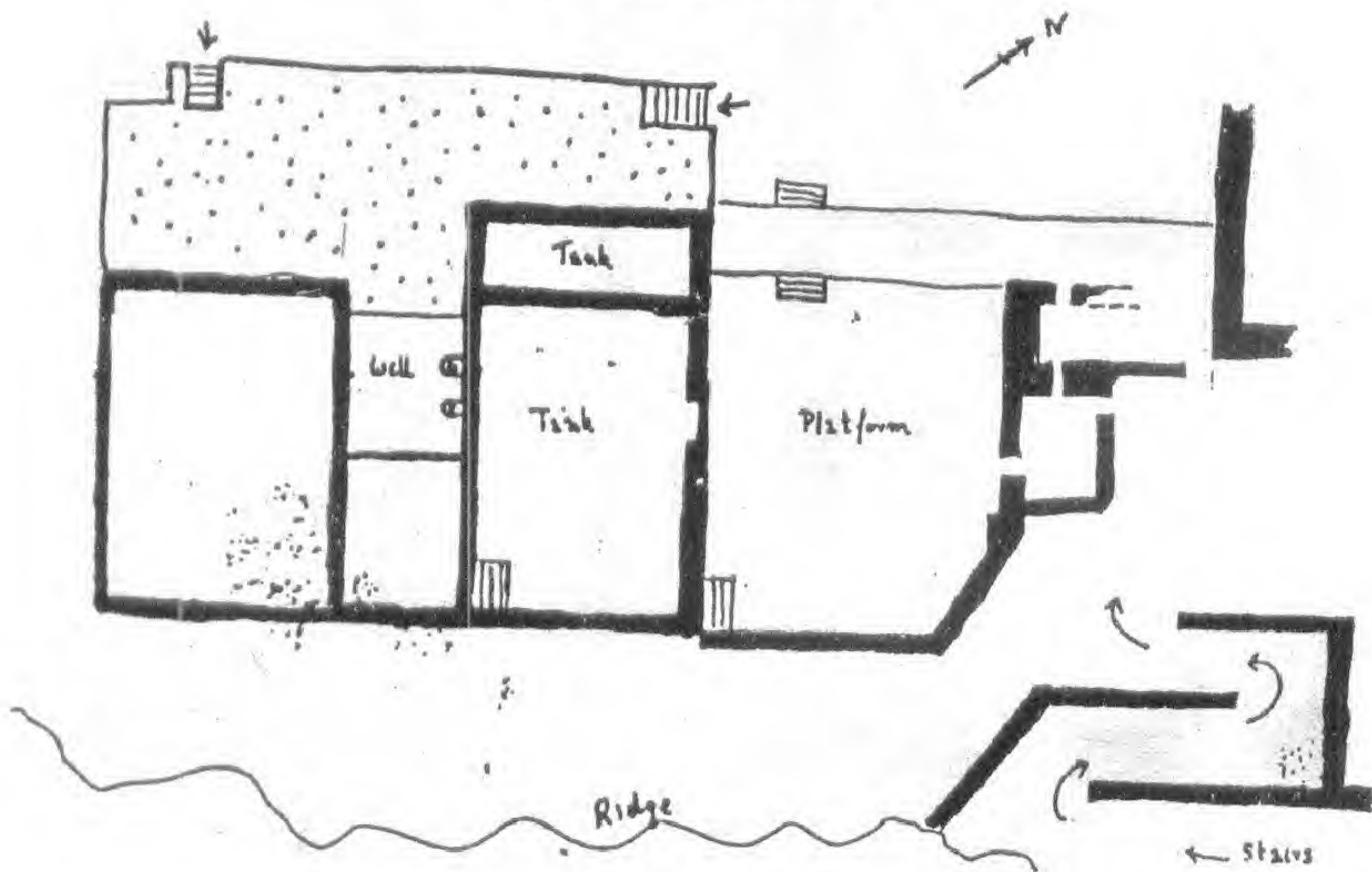


PLAN VI



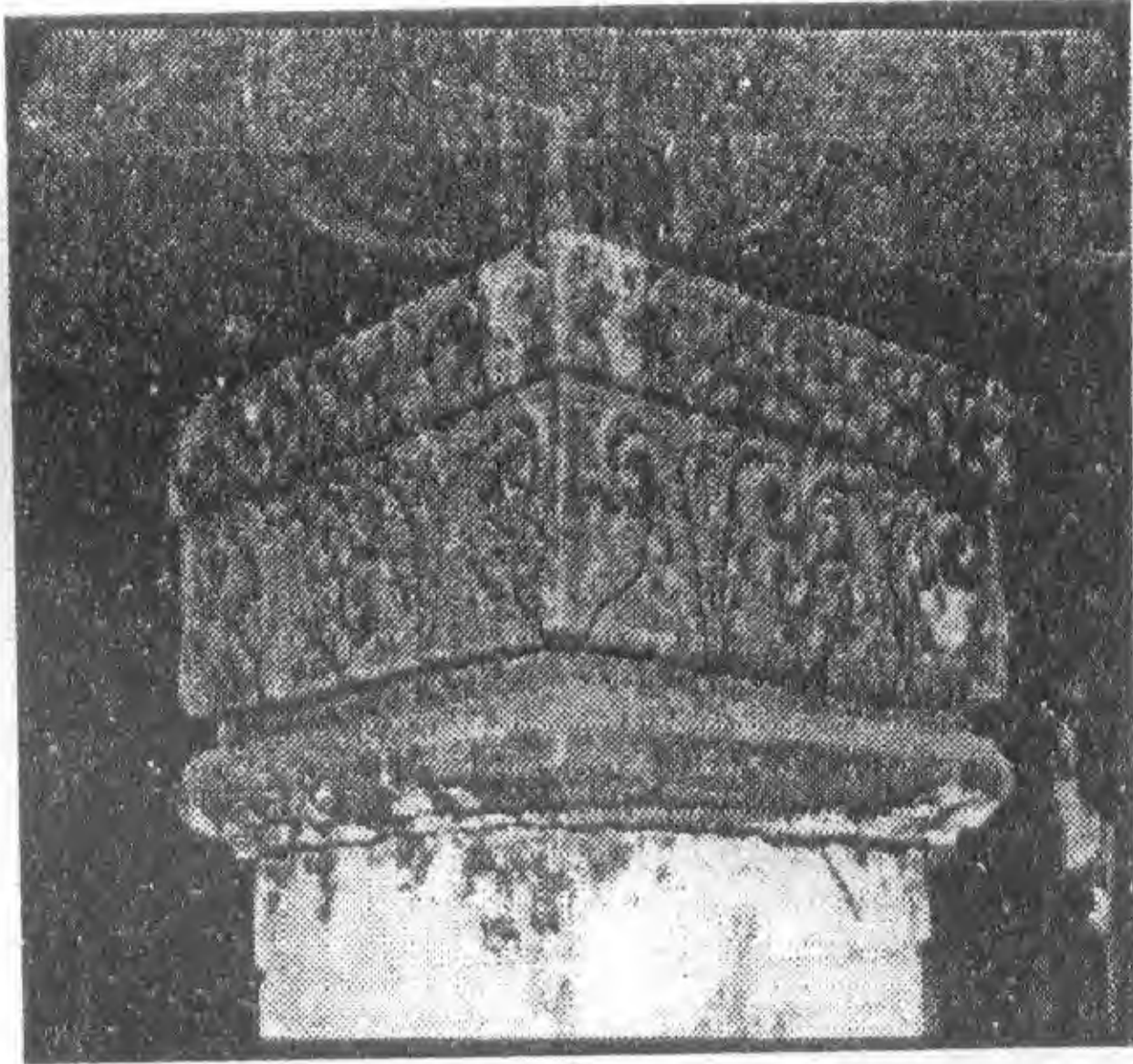
PLAN VII

**SHAHJAHAN'S GARDEN-PAVILION & BAOLI  
(Ground Floor)**

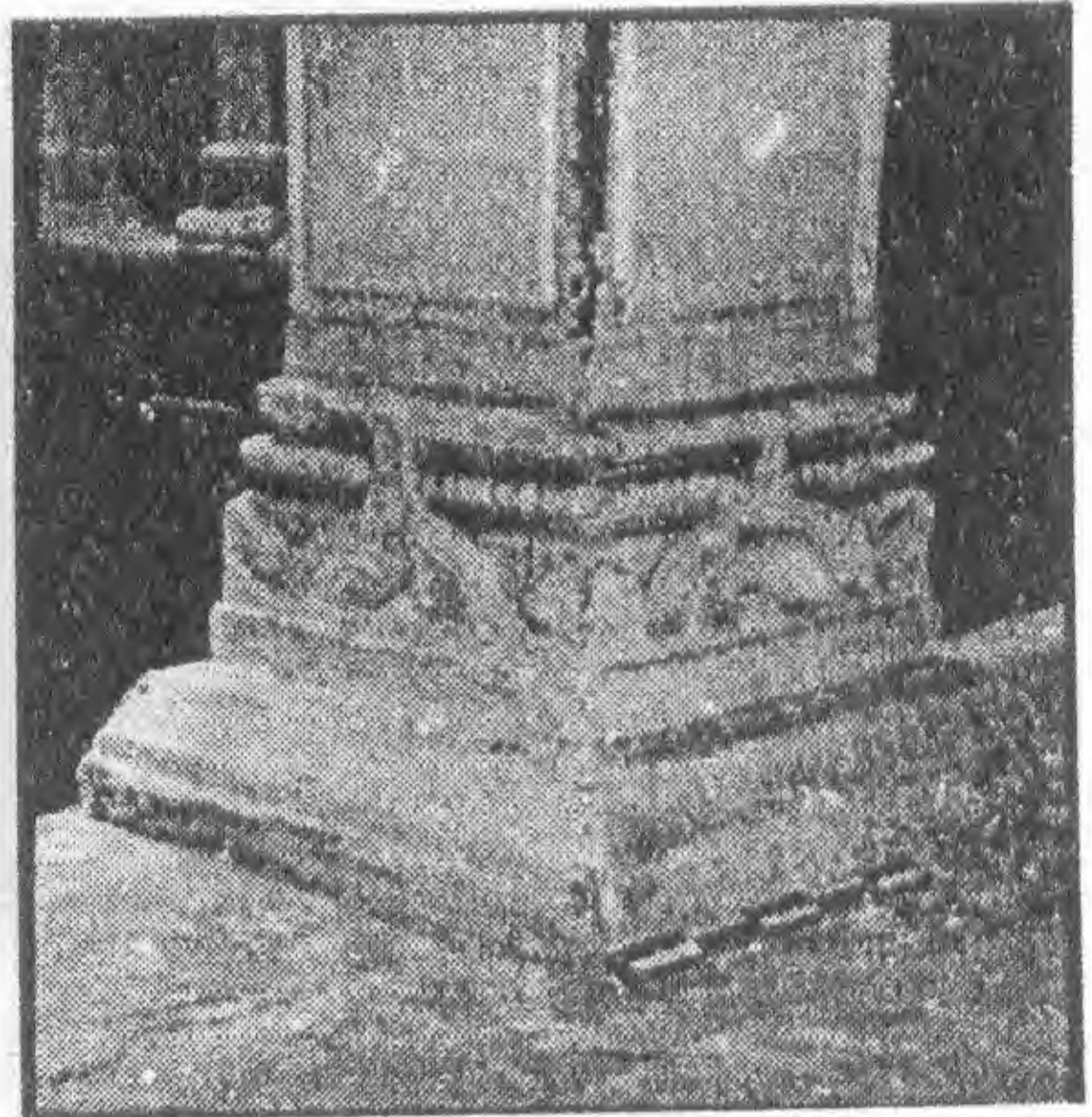


PLAN VIII

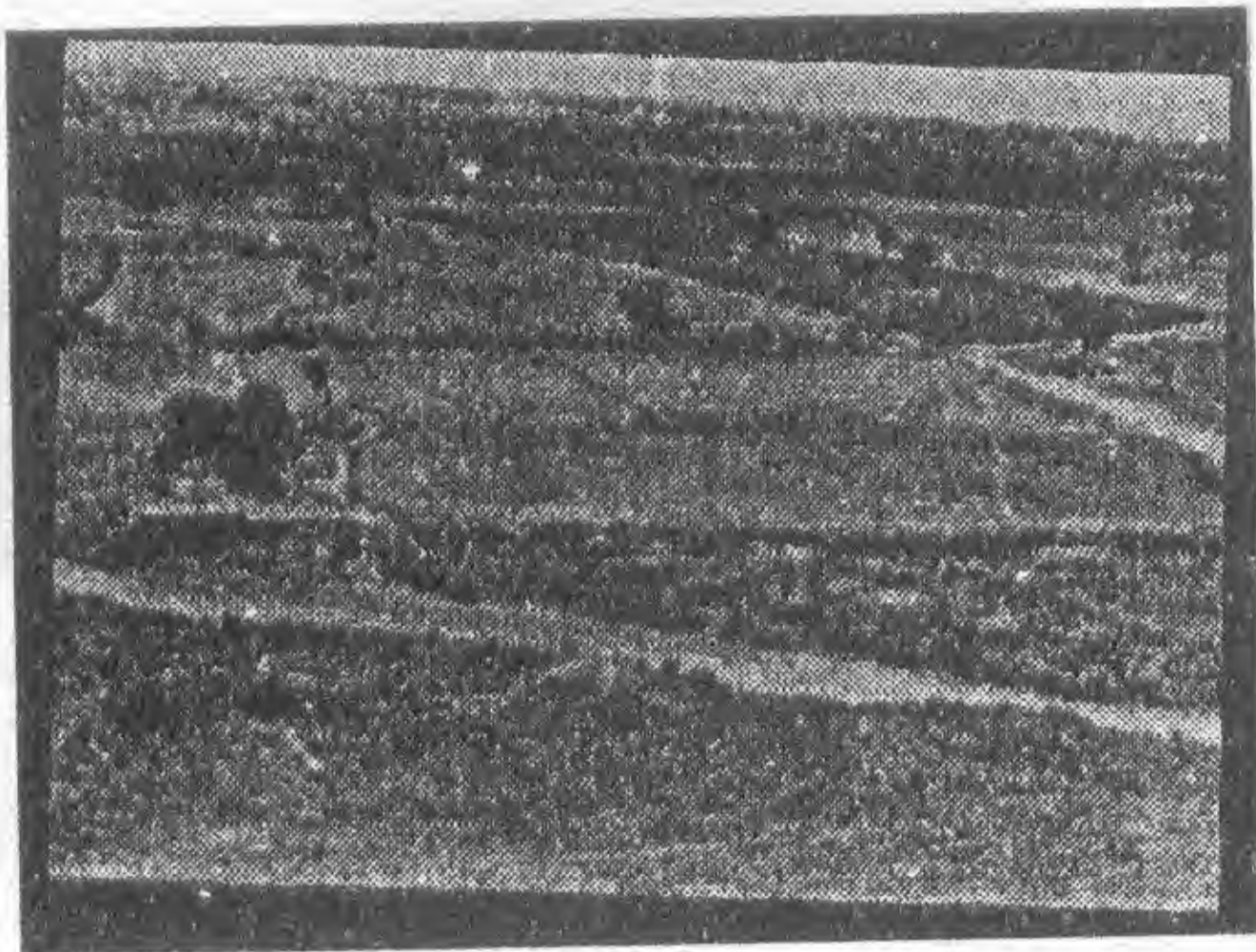
**PLATES**



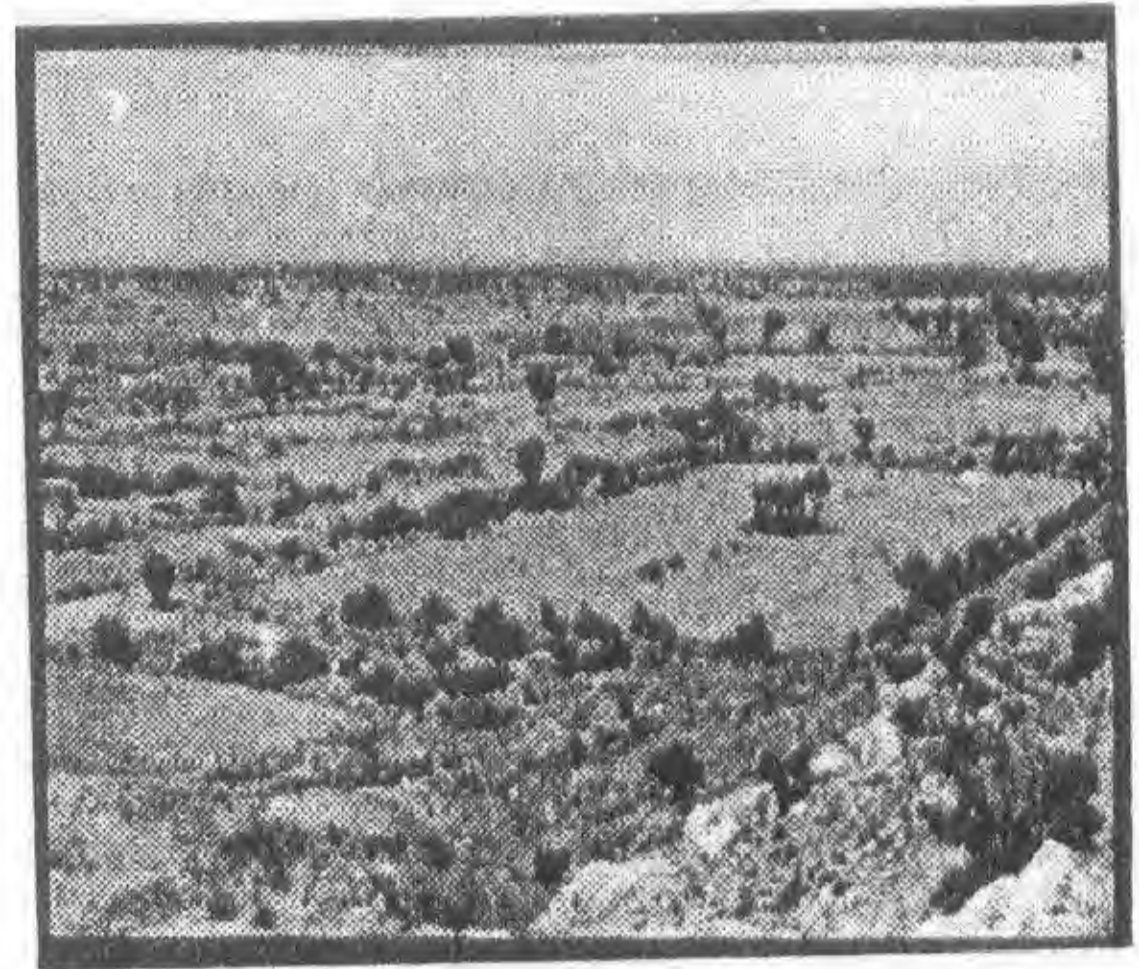
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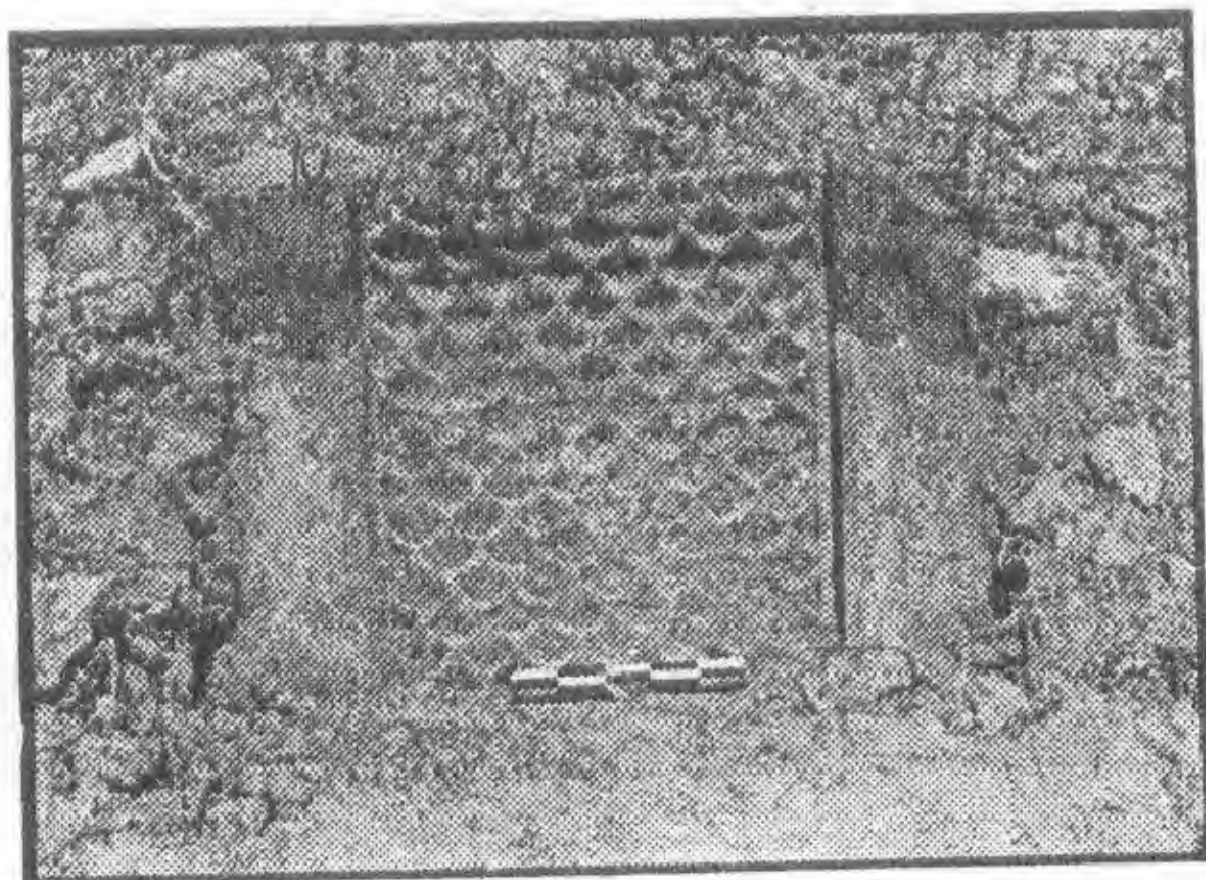
2



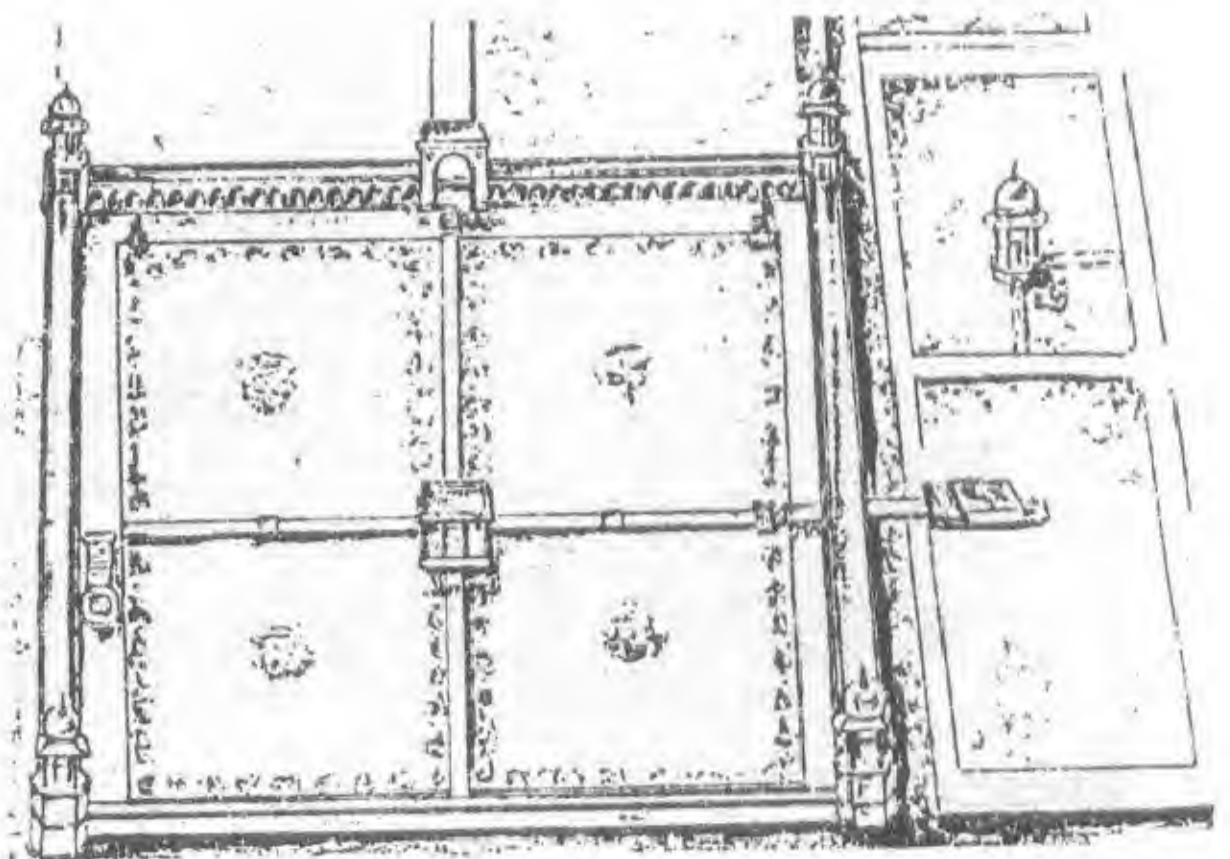
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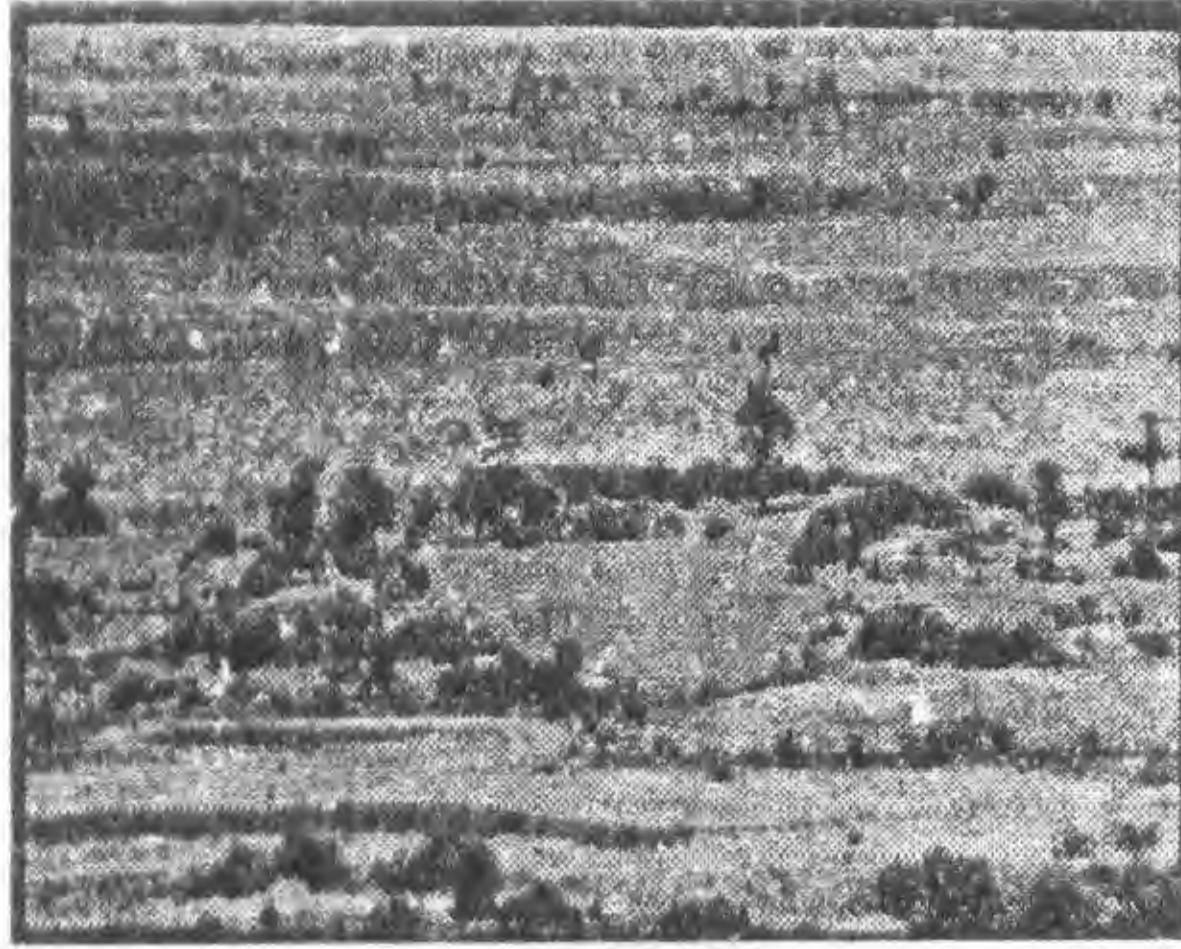
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5



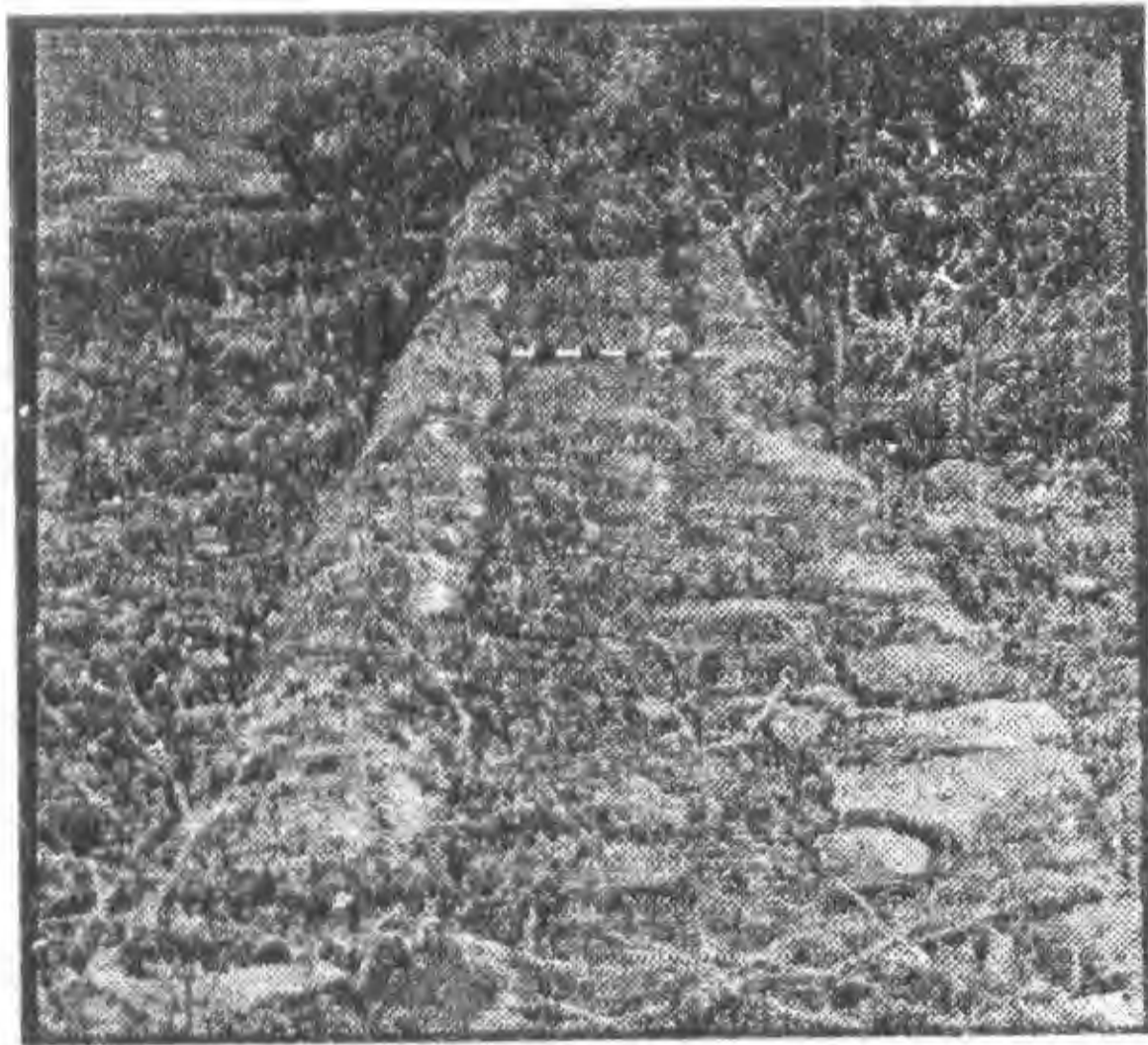
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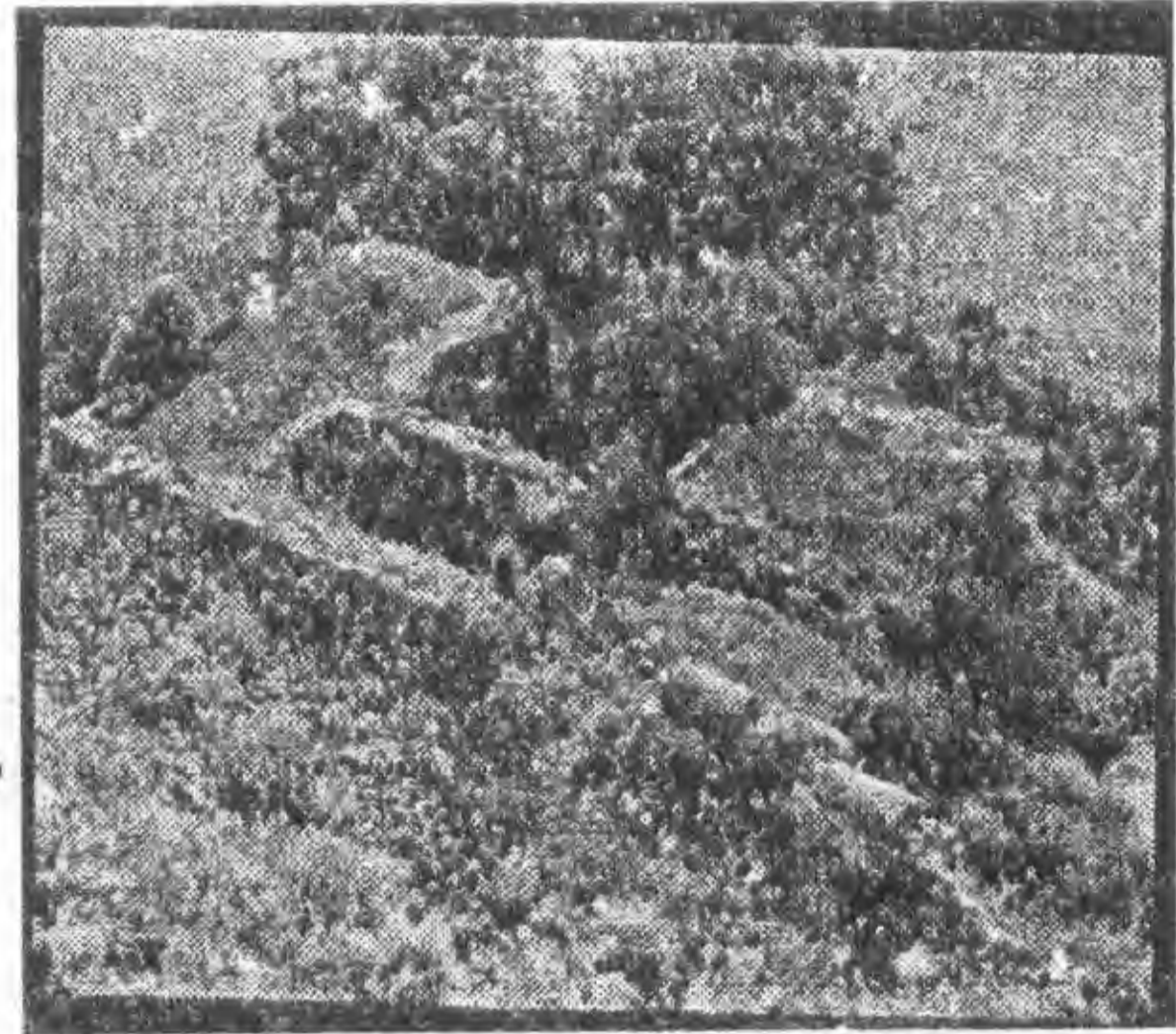
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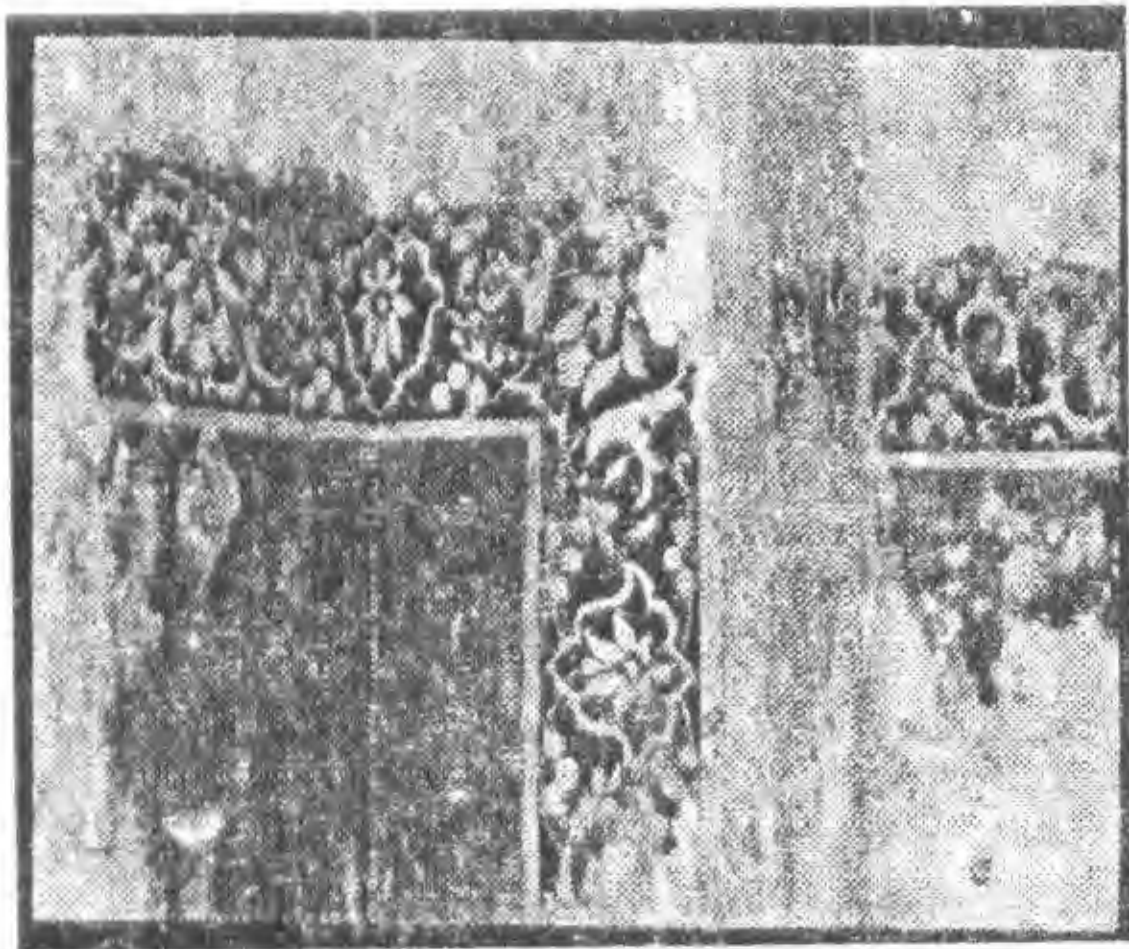
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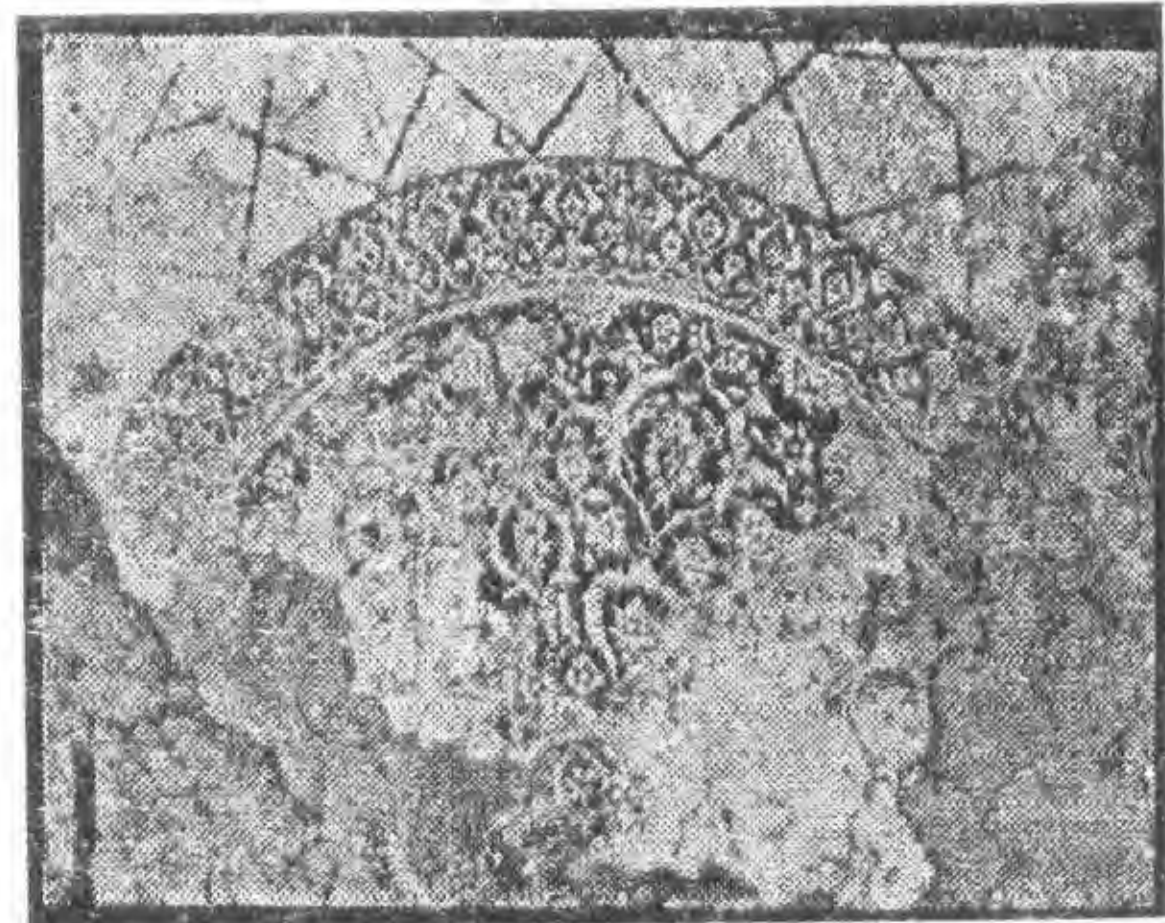
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10

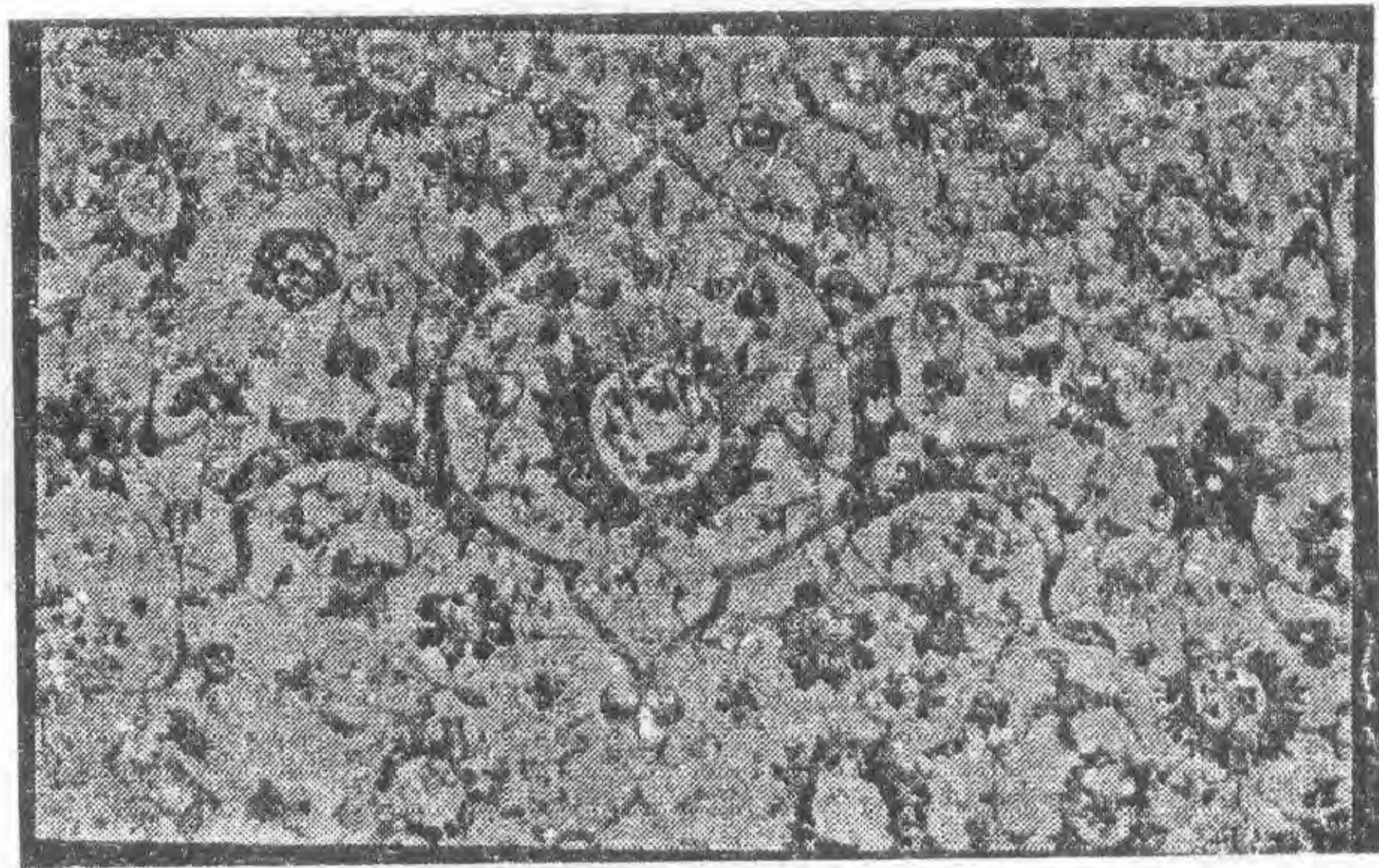


11

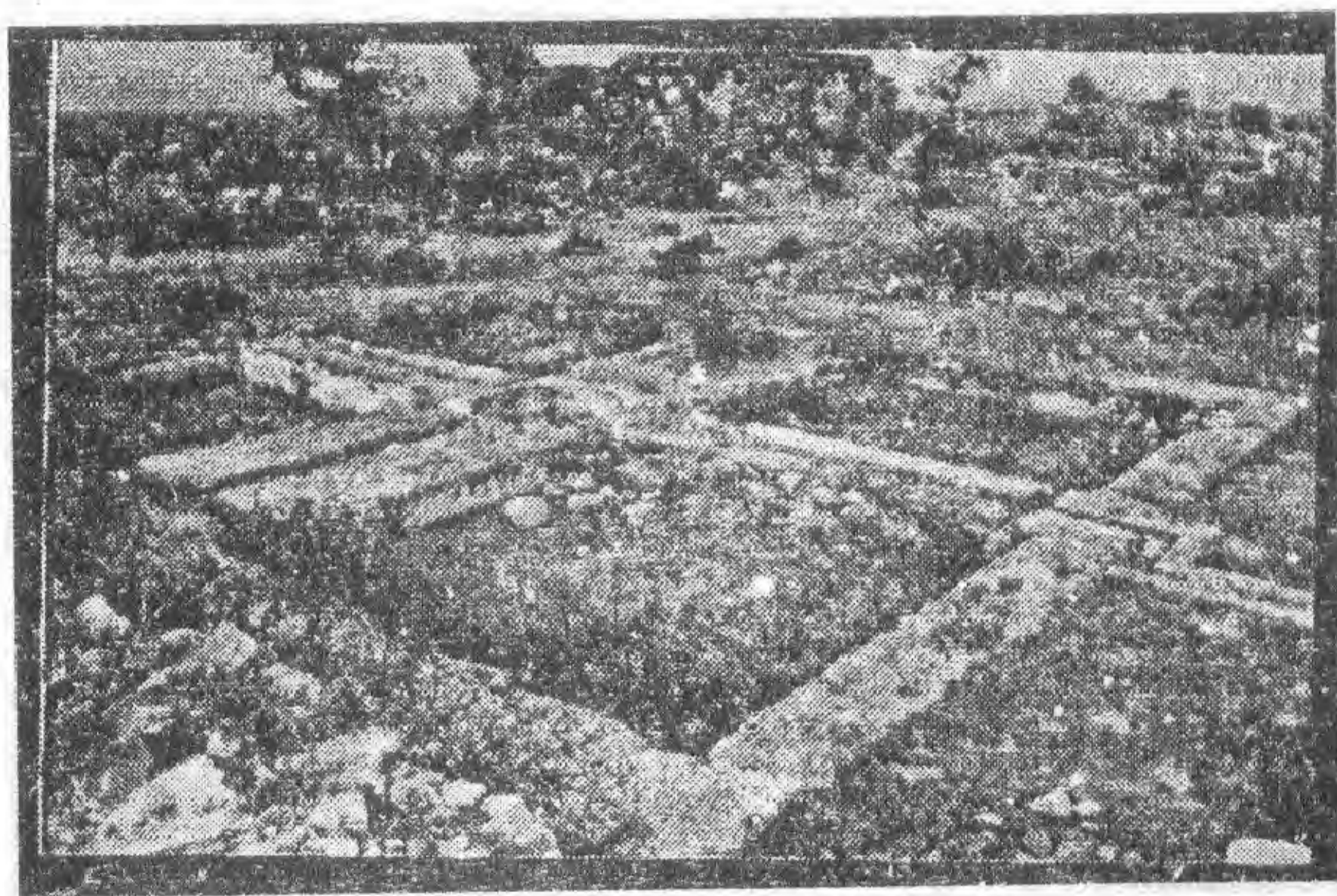


12

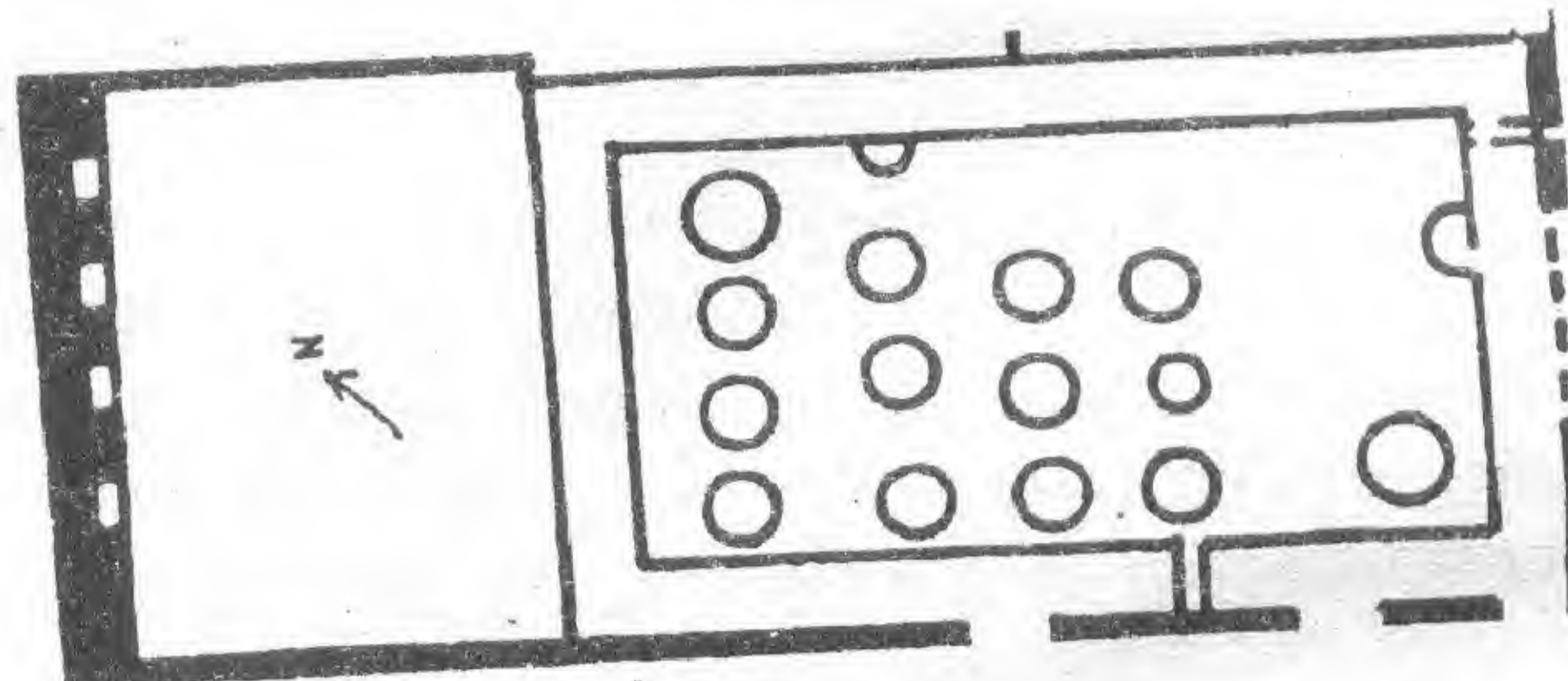




13



14



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